

**Recreational Reading Habits of Traditional Undergraduate Students in the United States**

**An Honors Thesis (SOC 681)**

**By**

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## Abstract

Previous research has resulted in confusion over whether traditional college-aged students are taking on recreational reading, or the process of reading for fun in a setting outside of work or class. Furthermore, no generalizable relationship between recreational reading and academic achievement in college (in the form of GPA) has yet been established, though current literature seems to predict that this may be the case. Plenty has been studied about motivational tactics and attitudes towards reading in younger age groups, but almost no attention has been paid to 18-25 year olds, the section of the population in which recreational reading as a hobby is decreasing the most. These topics will be addressed through a multi-modal, three-contact survey implementation design on a budget of \$7,500, should this proposal be put into motion. In its current form, this research project is purely a hypothetical exercise and has not been implemented. Additionally, the variables of race, class, gender, and university standing will be addressed in terms of how they are related to which respondents choose to take on recreational reading as a hobby.

## Acknowledgements

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## Process Analysis Statement

This document is the culminating project of SOC 681, a course designed to help individual students identify and design a wide-scale social science research project. The first step in the process of creating this project was delving deeply into existing literature to provide a framework in order to plan a study that was attempting to gain new, relevant information. I located and refined through several drafts, a list of 20 sources that I feel capture the current state of the issues that I am examining within my work including motivations, attitudes, perceived benefits, and changes in the relationship college students have with recreational reading as an activity. Determining which sources were most relevant and helpful was a difficult task, and many interesting sources did not end up making the final list for reasons such as being outdated or steering my research too far off of the topics I was attempting to learn about. This process allowed me to become familiar with popular journals that will be useful to me in the future when I pursue a career in library science. For each source I have created an entry that describes it in more detail as well as a discussion of the methods for each study, if applicable. Highlighting key information and terms within the literature gave me a better sense of the vocabulary I would be using within the planning portion of the project. Studying the methods allowed me to become familiar with frequently used tactics within this area of study, while reading the textbook that went along with the class also supplemented to this information.

After I had a firm grasp on current literature regarding reading and reading as a hobby, it was time to move onto the second part of the project, which I identify as the more creative portion. During this exercise, I was aiming to create different features that would be present within a social science research grant proposal, including documents such as a detailed list of research questions I would be addressing, a physical survey instrument that would be



implemented in order to collect data, as well as in-depth methodology, calendar, and budget sections. Each of these elements were intertwined with all the rest, so any time adjustments were made in one document, all of the rest of the documents would have to be reviewed and changed as necessary. This process also required several drafts of each component as I learned more about the research process through the class textbook and adjusted my methods and survey instrument to match that which leading research tells us are the best research conducting strategies.

Along the way, I have learned that I enjoy the second aspect of this process, the parts where I was asked to be creative and formulate a plan from scratch quite a bit more than the research aspect. While both are extremely important features of work that I hope to find myself doing in the future, I believe that it is also important to understand my strengths, weaknesses, likes, and dislikes. I feel that I had a strong sense of the research process going into this project, but coming out the other end of the tunnel, I have much more of an appreciation for the planning side of things. Going forward, this collection of documents has the potential to become a reality through applications to grants and other sources of funding. I think if given the opportunity, that I would enjoy the process of implementing my project and the resulting data would impact how university libraries and other on-campus resources interact with undergraduate students in an attempt to better fit their needs. Additionally, understanding the big picture about how college students are spending their time as well as how recreational reading has developed as an activity in recent years is important for institutions such as libraries.

## Review of Literature

The purpose of my research is to examine the habits of 18-25 year olds with relation to reading for pleasure. I am wanting to find out if time is being made for this hobby as well as why or why not. This means identifying potential factors that encourage recreational reading as well as potential hurdles that people my age face when trying to read for pleasure such as not having access to reading materials, not being able to discover a book that is interesting to them, or simply not having enough time. Additionally, I am hoping to investigate the relationship between spending time on recreational reading as a hobby and academic performance in the form of GPA. Lastly I would like to find out how the results to these question vary between the variables of race, class, gender, and university standing. This document is not a synthesized literature review but instead a more focused look at each of the sources that I have discovered with a relevance to my project. This format is a result of the emphasis placed on research methodology within SOC 681 (my HONR 499 substitute). Individualizing each entry allows for a discussion of the variety of different approaches to the survey research process that exist within the following literature.

Applegate, A. J., Applegate, M. D., Mercantini, M. A., McGeehan, C. M., Cobb, J. B., DeBoy, J. R., . . . Lewinski, K. E. (2014). The peter effect revisited: Reading habits and attitudes of college students. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 53(3), 188-204.  
doi:10.1080/19388071.2014.898719.

Universities seek to create “ideal readers” who are enthusiastic and fueled by reading both within and out of the classroom setting. Preferably, those seeking to become future educators will be “ideal readers.” However, this study concludes that only 46.6% of



surveyed students could be classified as enthusiastic readers, and only 5.7% could be classified as engaged and avid readers. Students are simply not engaged in the reading process, even when it is for a class. This study suggests that a possible cause of this disconnect is that the teachers who must instill this “ideal” readership are not enthusiastic about reading either. This study is important to my research because it illustrates a possible reason for disinterest in reading in general (lack of enthusiasm), while the article does not specifically talk about recreational reading.

This study involved 1,025 college sophomores from the East Coast. The Methods section mentions that these participants were chosen based on a convenience sample, which brings into question the representativeness of this data, while it is still a large sample. The researchers asked colleagues at their universities to allow them to interview a sample of students from their class. Students were in a variety of majors from areas of business, health sciences, humanities, mathematics, hard sciences, and social sciences. This was a good choice because students from different academic backgrounds might have different perspectives on reading.

Burak, L. (2004). Examining and predicting college students' reading intentions and behaviors:

An application of the theory of reasoned action. *Reading Horizons*, 45(2), 139. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/236493738>.

This study used the variables of age, gender, ethnicity, class, and GPA to address attitudes, outcomes, and intentions of college-aged students. This source is crucial to my research because of its similarity to mine. To evaluate the intentions of respondents, students were asked if they would be reading for pleasure any time during the current semester. Half of the respondents indicated that they would be somewhat likely or very likely to read for pleasure during the current semester, while an even higher percentage (50.3 & 66.2) said that they would read for pleasure over spring break and summer break, respectively. To evaluate actual outcomes, students were asked if they read for pleasure any time during the past semester, and 63% indicated that they had read at least one book during that time frame. Gender was the only variable that had a significant impact on students' attitudes, outcomes, and intentions across the board. This was likely a result of the sampling

procedure that was a convenience sample, distributed to classrooms within a mid-size institution. Respondents did not vary much in terms of age and ethnicity, so more research on this subject is important in order to determine its validity.

De Naeghel, J., & Van Keer, H. (2013). The relation of student and class-level characteristics to primary school students' autonomous reading motivation: A multi-level approach. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 36(4), 351-370. doi:10.1111/jrir.12000.

Autonomous reading motivation among students is based upon a variety of factors, mostly environmental. Important factors included within this study were student and classroom characteristics. It was found that female students, but not those of immigrant families (as was expected), were more likely to be a motivated autonomous reader, and classrooms that allowed for involvement in peer-reading activities produces this result as well. Positive home, school, and peer environments in relation to academic and recreational reading is an important part of developing a love and enthusiasm for reading early on.

1,177 5<sup>th</sup> grade students participated in the study. They were from across the country of Belgium and were all from similar, averagely-achieving primary schools. This similarity between the schools is an important step because comparing a high-achieving school to a low-achieving school would not be a fair comparison. For example, those in the high-achieving school might have had greater access to books as a child which has significantly affected their attitude towards reading within the classroom and within their peer groups. In addition, I thought that the way the researchers defined the students autonomous reading motivation was interesting and probably the most accurate way to extract this data. It was done by asking students two times (once for academic reading and once for recreational reading) how strongly they agreed with the statements "I read because it is fun," "I read because it is interesting," or "I read because it is important." While this study deals with 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, I think the information is still applicable because our reading habits are formed from a young age and I am interesting if seeing if this gender difference occurs even in those 18-25.



Dewan, P. (2015). Reading trends and college-age students: The research, the issues, and the role of libraries. *Against the Grain*, 27(1) doi:10.5860/crl.76.4.469.

This article presents data from multiple sources suggesting that reading as a leisure activity has been radically decreasing in recent years, with the largest concentration of decrease being in college-aged individuals, which is the age group I am interested in studying. Then, possible barriers to reading in the current day are suggested, including things like screen reading, which encourages skimming and discourages prolonged reflection. Another culprit is increased distractions such as social media and cell phones that are constantly begging for our attention. It seems that those raised during the rise in popularity of the internet may not have the attention span to read for a prolonged period of time, or finish a book that was previously started. These frequently observable barriers will be an important thing to keep in mind when I am constructing questions dealing with what is holding people my age back from adopting recreational reading as a hobby. The article ends by describing the important role that pleasure reading has in our society: that it encourages us to place ourselves in another person's shoes and/or empathize.

As this citation was not a study, but merely a collection of information, there will be no discussion of methods.

Dewan, P. (2016). Economic well-being and social justice through pleasure reading. *New Library World*, 117(9), 557-567. 10.1108/NLW-03-2016-0019 Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/NLW-03-2016-0019>.

Past research has frequently focused on the potential positive effects of reading for pleasure on the individual level, but almost none regarding how a tendency to read recreationally positively impacts society and government. This study hoped to explore this topic by "examining a wide range of studies by government bodies, intergovernmental agencies, and academics." The results concluded that since leisure reading leads to higher literacy, society can become more equitable.

While a single action's effect on an entire society is hard to pin down, I appreciated the effort that this study made in doing just that. The tentative result of this survey provides further reasoning for the promotion of a culture of reading for pleasure. Since I am interested in discovering the possible benefits that college students perceive about recreational reading, adding a more big picture perspective into my survey instrument to measure this type of benefit could be an interesting perspective in addition to perceived benefits on the individual level.

Garces-Bacsal, R. M., & Yeo, S. D. (2017). Why and what they read when they don't have to:

Factors influencing the recreational reading habits of gifted students in singapore. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 40(3), 247-265. doi:10.1177/0162353217717035.

Given the consistent pattern between reading habits as a child and reading habits as an adult, it is important to begin encouraging children to read at a young age both in the classroom and at home. Since there are social and emotional benefits to reading, finding explanations for why students are increasingly finding reading unenjoyable is a task that can help to reverse this cycle. There are two types of reading for pleasure, "efferent reading" which places emphasis on deriving information and "aesthetic reading" in which the reader recognizes the potential the book has to change him or her. Those who engage more in the second kind are able to be better connected as well as make better connections within their world. Results suggested that more avid readers found more meaning in their reading which in turn encouraged them to read even more, whereas less-avid readers focused on lower-level gains such as vocabulary. Having enough time and self-identification as a good or bad reader also created differences in student's pursuit of recreational reading. These various results of recreational reading, such as a better connectedness or bigger vocabulary could potentially have a huge impact on the time people spend reading for pleasure as well as how it makes them feel.

125 gifted students from grades 4 to 6 created a recreational reading log, which divided the group into more avid readers and less avid readers. As the study suggests, this is an important age to study reading habits because their adult reading patterns are formed during this stage. Next, interviews were conducted asking the students questions about how they



perceived different aspects of reading. It could have been useful to use more variety of student academic levels, not just those in a gifted program, since it is important for all students to read, not just ones who perform well academically. Additionally, I thought that the students may have been tempted to change their reading patterns for the week that they kept a log in order to make it seem like they read more than they usually do. Possibly keeping a log for longer than a week could allow students more time to relax into their more typical reading habits, though this would be more work on both the researcher and student.

García Schnetzer, A. (2008). To read or not to read. *National Endowment for the Arts.*, 20(164), 99. Retrieved from <http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/oaiart?codigo=2570761>.

Data tells us that progress of reading ability consistently halts once students reach their teenage years and that there is a general decline in young adult and adult reading across the board. Poor reading skills correlate with lower financial and job success, meaning that this is truly an alarming and important problem. General findings include “Americans are spending less time reading, reading comprehension skills are eroding, and that these declines have serious civic, social, cultural, and economic implications.” In the age group that I am interested in studying, college students, it was concluded that 65% of college freshman read less than an hour per week or not at all for pleasure, nearly double the percentage of nonreaders found in high schools. Likely culprits causing this extreme decrease are other forms of media including TV, internet, and social media in particular.

This write-up included national test scores and self-reported behavioral patterns from the Department of Education. This data is now 10 years old, so there has been a chance for results to change. Further, the heavy claims used within the article encourage action and substantially demonstrate why reading is so important. I believe that this article is probably my best sources for current trends among the age group I wish to study (college students). Lastly, the article also delves into some of the habits competing for the time and attention of students, which will be helpful in examining what does and does not motivate students to read.

Gilbert, J., & Fister, B. (2011). Reading, risk, and reality: College students and reading for pleasure. *College & Research Libraries*, 72(5), 474-495. doi:10.5860/crl-148.

This study suggests college student's attitudes towards reading for pleasure are much more positive than previously thought. While multichannel stimulation does create more distracting scenarios for students than ever before, students are still very engaged in reading text outside of class. In fact, almost all students preferred their recreational reading to reading for school. 93% of students surveyed reported that they enjoyed leisure reading, with very little significant differences between gender, race, major, class, or year. While this is a promising sign, it does not change the fact that very few students participated in the activity of reading for pleasure. This observation alludes to the fact there must be other factors, beyond lack of enjoyment, holding college-aged students back from recreational reading. A basic consideration of other potential factors revealed that students already have enough reading for class or would rather spend their time in other ways.

This source is a great backbone for what I would like to study. It demonstrates that just because students aren't reading, it doesn't mean they don't enjoy it. I would like to further investigate the tradeoffs that students make to fill their time instead of not reading for pleasure and why they make these specific tradeoffs. This data was collected by surveying a portion of the students at Gustavus Adolphus College, a small liberal arts college whose reading habits were not significantly different from other schools of the same size and nature. The survey was given to several instructors throughout different majors and had the potential to reach 28.7 percent of the student body. This is a low amount of the total population, so it seems that there is likely a great deal of bias, since not everyone had a fair chance of being selected to complete the survey.

Goodwin, L. (1996). Aliteracy among college students: Why don't they read? Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the College Reading Association. (40th, Charleston, SC, October 31-November 3, 1996).



The professor who presented this paper at a conference was interested in finding out why his students (and lots of American college students more broadly) did not read the textbook, or really any books at all. To do this, he conducted in depth interviews with those who indicated on a survey that they were "aliterate" or lacking a reading habit, even though they were physically capable of reading. Many of the students he spoke with were not interested in reading from a young age. Additionally, their parents didn't demonstrate reading as a habit while they were growing up. All of the students who were interviewed had high reading capability and potential, however they simply chose not to take on the activity, in this case for class. This 'aliteracy' disinterest illustrates something that could be key to my study, that college students really aren't interested in reading, and therefore it should come as no surprise that they do not spend time on recreational reading. But Goodwin's interviews also reveal that the students often undervalued their reading abilities as well, feeling that they were not as competent of readers as others in their classes, which he suggests could be a cause of some of this disinterest. Goodwin interviewed 8 students, and was able to observe some themes and patterns among their extended answers. Interestingly, the students he spoke with also indicated that they still believed that they deserved an 'A' even though they had done essentially none of the readings.

Greaney, V., & Hegarty, M. (1987). Correlates of leisure-time reading. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 10(1), 3-20.

This study examined student's reading habits from the perspective of their home lives. The result indicate that parents who interact in positive ways with reading will cause their children to do the same. Since more educated parents typically tend to read more, and more educated parents are also the part of middle-class homes, it follows that students in middle-class homes are more likely to take up reading as a hobby than those in lower-class environments. This result held true even after controlling for sex, reading achievement, and library membership. This is an excellent example of how class is related to the inclination to read for pleasure, which will be important when assigning variables within my study. Additionally, this study concluded that enjoyment from reading was a better indicator of more time spent on the hobby rather than reading for utilitarian or escapist reasons.

Ivey, G., & Broaddus, K. (2001). "Just plain reading": A survey of what makes students want to read in middle school classrooms. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 36(4), 350-377.

Getting middle school students to have a positive attitude towards reading can be tough. This research looks in to the various ways that classroom instructors can successfully get their students to be excited about reading. Open-ended responses allowed students who indicated that they like and actively pursued reading to tell about their experience to hopefully gain insight as to why they had come to be this way. Students indicated a large selection of books was a huge motivator when it came to wanting to read. They had to be able to find something that was going to be able to hold their interest, and having a wide variety to choose from seemed to enhance their belief that there was a good enough book for them within the collection. They also enjoyed the teacher reading out loud, but this finding is not as relevant to my work. The results of this study indicate that some sense of motivation to read for pleasure can come from having adequate access to reading materials that interest a person, if the results can be applied to a college-aged person.

Huang, S., Capps, M., Blacklock, J., & Garza, M. (2014). Reading habits of college students in the united states. *Reading Psychology*, 35(5), 437-467.  
doi:10.1080/02702711.2012.739593.

Much has been studied about elementary and high school student reading habits, but rarely is the college student population asked about their reading habits. When they have been, the results are usually not useful or are inconclusive. This study compared amounts of academic reading and extracurricular reading to determine how students are spending their time. Reading has been rapidly changing with the introduction of new technologies, and the internet is now a popular reading source for many, so nontraditional reading sources like this were accounted for within this survey. The average amount of time per week spent on academic reading was 7.72 hours, reading for pleasure was 4.42 hours, and reading on the internet was 8.95 hours. The number of hours reading for pleasure on the internet was separated from the amount of time spent reading traditional print materials because the study was also looking at new media such as the internet and its impact on recreational



reading habits. When college students read an online source such as a book, magazine, or website, they have a higher tendency to skim or skip parts, whereas when reading a physical book the process is more slow and methodical. While some studies have shown that reading by college students has decreased in recent years, this study would suggest that students are still reading, just through different means, such as the internet. It is important to adapt the definition of reading in the digital age.

This was an interesting finding that college students are spending that much time reading on the internet, although it is not surprising. Online internet reading seems to be the direction that we are headed towards as a society, and more research needs to be done on the differences in reading habits between print sources and digital sources. Viewing posts or status updates on social media would count I assume, but I am not sure if they should. This study was again conducted in one university in the south-western U.S., but I would like to find out if the results could be generalized to describe the whole U.S. population.

Jude D. Gallik. (1999). Do they read for pleasure? recreational reading habits of college students. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 42(6), 480-488. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40014062>.

Many colleges and employers are curious about their potential applicant's recreational reading habits, because they can be a potential predictor of a good worker or student. Is reading for pleasure in one's spare time an accurate predictor of whether academic or workplace success? According to data collected in this study, yes and no. While class is in session, there is not a significant relationship between GPA and hours spent reading for pleasure, but there was a significant correlation found between student GPA and hours spent reading for pleasure on vacation.

I thought that this was a very interesting result to my original research question of the relationship between college performance (GPA) and time spent reading for pleasure. This makes sense given the workload placed on students while classes are in session. Those students who choose to read for pleasure when they do have the time to read recreationally were doing better in school. This research surveyed 151 students in only English

composition courses, which could cause error since those enrolled in an English composition could potentially have a higher interest in reading and books than the average person.

Kazelskis, R., Thames, D., Reeves, C., Flynn, R., Taylor, L., Beard, L. A., & Turnbo, D. (2004).

Reliability and stability of elementary reading attitude survey scores across gender, race, and grade level. *The Professional Educator*, 27(1-2), 29.

This work examines elementary-aged student's reading attitudes in relation to some of the same variables that I will use in my work: gender, race, and grade level. Opinions about both recreational reading as well as academic reading were collected. Each student took the survey a total of two times within a seven day period to address whether attitudes towards reading were stable and would stay the same from day to day. Reading attitudes were actually found to be significantly unstable, especially in those below 6th grade. It would be very interesting to address this same question with college students, as it is a possibility that their thoughts and feelings about reading could change from day to day as well. For instance, one week a student could have extra class readings that would discourage them away from spending their free time on outside reading.

The results for this study all come from 11 different schools in 4 different school districts in a southern state, making this another study that cannot definitively be applied to the whole country. It would be interesting to find out if the result was generalizable to other areas of the country as educational standards can differ from state to state. Furthermore, I would be interested in this studies relation to older individuals, such as those in college, aged 18-25.

Knoester, M., & Plikuhn, M. (2016). Inquiry into the independent reading development of first-

generation college graduates with advanced degrees. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 48(1), 105-126. doi:10.1177/1086296X16658739.



Parents' educational values and practices shape the lives of their children in many ways, including the formation of individual reading habits. This study examined first-generation college students to determine what about their home environment, if anything, set them up to be more likely to attend college after high school. Results showed that the influence of an individual, institution, or community that fosters a love for reading and supports literacy efforts has a very large impact on the outcomes of students in their decision to go to college. This result shows the importance of parents, teachers, librarians, and all community members to promote literacy in every way they can in order to help create a love of reading in those who are encountering it for the first time.

In this interview process, academic success was defined as a graduate degree and involvement of recreational reading within their lives signified its importance to them. I think that the information gathered here was a good starting point to show the importance that a literacy figure can have in a person's life. As this study relates to the process of how one comes to form a habit of recreational reading, the snowball sampling technique was perfectly valid.

McQuillan, J. (2013). Urban middle and high school students' reading attitudes and beliefs: A large-sample survey. *Global Journal of Human Social Science Linguistics & Education*, 13(7) Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1554123314>.

This large sample of middle school students indicates that girls have more positive attitudes towards reading than boys, which results in an increase in frequency of time spent reading. The frequency and attitudes of students within this study were also positively correlated with reading achievements and scores at school. McQuillan concludes that attitudes about reading along with a belief in personal reading competence lead to increased motivation to read. Motivation to read, of course, determines how much time is actually spent reading. This result places the formation of recreational reading as a habit on the importance of forming positive experiences and attitudes with reading.

14,015 urban 7th to 12th graders in Southern California were surveyed to reach this conclusion. Again, this result is not necessarily representative of the whole nation, so

further research will be needed in order to determine what conclusions can be drawn about other areas of the country. The relationship of gender and attitude towards reading mentioned within this study will prove useful for my own research as I will be using gender as an independent variable.

Merga, M. K. (2017). What would make children read for pleasure more frequently? *English in Education*, 51(2), 207-223. doi:10.1111/eie.12143.

Literacy is a continuum that children must continue along even after they have mastered the basic skills of reading. The more you read, the more you learn, not just information from the book itself, but also how to read better and more effectively. Therefore, literacy for youth is important because the major changes happen at that age. We must understand what gets kids to read and keep reading on into adulthood for the largest set of benefits possible. Finding books that the children are interested in, the concept of series adherence (more than one is better), and having challenging enough books are all suggested methods of keeping kids engaged in the reading and learning process.

I would be interested in finding out if these same methods of keeping young children engaged in the reading process would also apply to those in the 18-25 category. The sample for this study was selected to be representative of all Western Australian schools, so the data does not represent the U.S.. Government. Non-government schools were included as well as rural and metropolitan schools. 47 children ages 4 to 6 were interviewed about their reading habits. They were asked "what would make you read more books?" This study seems to be of high quality and certainly yielded some interesting remarks from these young children.

Mueller, K. L., Hanson, M., Martinez, M., & Meyer, L. (2017). Patron preferences: Recreational reading in an academic library. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 43(1), 72-81. doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2016.08.019.

Academic libraries are typically meant to be a college-students main source of reading material. The Sam Houston State University Library attempted to find out how it could



better its collections to bring in more of what the community wanted. While the library had a vast collection of research texts, the survey found that students were seeking more recreational reading materials in the library. While students did not always have the time to read for pleasure, when they did find the time, a limiting factor in this case was access to recreational reading materials such as fictional novels. Patrons also showed preference for materials in print (as opposed to online), a conclusion that contradicts findings elsewhere. This research was intended to benefit only the select community from which it sampled, but larger implications of this research suggest that some students who wish to read for pleasure lack access to the types of materials that they are wanting to read.

The survey was sent by email to all Sam Houston State University students, faculty, staff, and recent graduates, with a response rate of 5.4%. The results also indicate that the individuals who chose to respond to the survey may have been more inclined to read recreationally than those who chose not to. I believe that the results were very useful because the people who likely responded to the survey were those who were seeking something different from their academic library. While the purpose of this survey was improving an existing academic library, I think that the result of students wanted more recreational reading materials signifies that students at other universities could want this same access. More research would have to be done to make that conclusion.

Shostya, A. (2015). The use of time among college students\ A U.S. – china

comparison. *International Journal of Education*, 7(1), 195. doi:10.5296/ije.v7i1.7037.

This study reports that college students in China spend twice as long on “academic activities” which include both studying and reading related to homework and non-homework related reading (or recreational reading) than students at college in the U.S.. Additionally, Chinese students and U.S. students spent similar amounts of time on working/interning, playing video games, using the internet, and watching TV. There is only a difference in their “academic activities.” This result is helpful in highlighting a deficiency in reading habits for U.S. college students, but it does not explain how all the extra time that American student have is spent. More research is needed to determine this, but the article suggests it could be things that were not included in daily activities such as exercising and

socializing. This information will be useful in addressing alternatives to recreational reading within my study, if people do indicate that they choose not to participate in the activity.

Watson, E. M. (2016). The importance of leisure reading to health sciences students: Results of a survey. *Health Information & Libraries Journal*, 33(1), 33-48. doi:10.1111/hir.12129.

In this study, undergraduate students in the health care field at a Canadian university were asked about their recreational reading habits. The majority of the students (approximately 70%) had spent time reading a book for fun in the past week. This result would potentially not be consistent with data from the U.S. since some research has indicated that U.S. college students do not read for pleasure this regularly. This difference in reading patterns between cultures indicates that there is potentially a social/cultural barrier that is holding traditional college-age students back from reading for pleasure. Most of those in this study who had not read in the past week claimed lack of time as their reason for not spending time on reading for fun (95%). Other reasons included fatigue (50.2%), expense of reading materials (18.8%), and lack of accessible reading materials (12.4%). Also, 72% of those who responded to the survey indicated that they believed reading fiction for pleasure had helped them to develop empathy. I am interested in finding if this benefit of improved empathy which these Canadian students believe came in part from reading for fun is a perceived benefit of recreational reading in the U.S. as well.



## Research Questions & Significance

As a college-aged student and avid reader, it can be hard to explain to my peers why I enjoy recreational reading, or the act of reading for a purpose other than work or school. “Ideal readers,” or those who show enthusiasm towards the act of reading both inside and outside the classroom and work environment (Applegate, 2014), generally all have several particular characteristics in common. First, behind every college student who spends time reading for pleasure, there is someone who demonstrated a healthy and enjoyable recreational reading habit for them during their youth, be it a teacher (Applegate et al., 2014; Garces-Bacsal & Yeo, 2017; Ivey & Broadus, 2001), or a parent (Goodwin, 1996; Greaney & Hegarty, 1987; Knoester & Plikuhn, 2016). Next, individuals who are more inclined to read for pleasure all tend to have a high amount of self-satisfaction in their reading skills as well as increased motivation to read and positive attitudes towards reading for both pleasure and for work (McQuillan, 2013; Merga, 2017). Lastly, females (Burak, 2004; De Naeghel & Van Keer, 2013) and middle and upper class (Greaney & Hegarty, 1987) students are more likely to read recreationally. On the other hand, barriers that can hold people back from spending time reading for pleasure include increased technology use (Dewan, 2015; Huang, Caps, Blacklock, & Garza, 2014; Shostya, 2015) and lack of access to interesting reading materials (Ivey & Broadus, 2001; Mueller, Hanson, Martinez, & Meyer, 2017). While some view reading for pleasure as a waste of time, it is hard to shake the feeling that there is at least some small benefit to participating in the activity. In fact, there is lots of research pertaining to both the benefits and perceived benefits of recreational reading that seem to suggest there is some truth to this feeling. Many believe that their sense of empathy improves greatly (Watson, 2016) and others feel as though they have more meaning and better connections in their lives (Garces-Bacsal, 2017) from taking on reading

as a hobby. A connection can even be drawn between academic performance (in the form of GPA) and reading for pleasure (Jude, 1999). Dewan takes this idea one step further by suggesting that since leisure reading leads to higher literacy, society is able to become more equitable (2016). In addition to positive effects associated with recreational reading, there are also negative effects associated with *not* participating in recreational reading. García, for instance, found that poor reading skills correlate with lower financial and job success (2008). Furthermore, some findings suggest that students my age actually do enjoy reading for pleasure and feel this same sense of benefit associated with the activity, a result that is contradictory to the true reading habits of college-aged students (Gilbert, 2011). Are students my age reading for fun? Do they perceive benefits or drawbacks to the activity? If they are not setting aside time for recreational reading, why not? Furthermore, what would convince college students to include recreational reading into their schedules? Does academic performance in terms of GPA have a relationship with the decision to spend time reading for pleasure? Lastly, how do these results differ across race, class, gender, and class standing?

While much research has been done in the area of benefits of reading for pleasure, very few studies have explored why college-aged students in particular are not picking up recreational reading as a hobby in result of this information. Research in this area is important because we need to be able to understand what is holding America's youth back from reading for pleasure and gaining the associated benefits along the way such as a heightened sense of empathy. Furthermore, perhaps information gleaned from investigating this topic will reveal that the issue that is keeping more individuals from recreational reading is a simply solved problem such as access to interesting and relevant reading materials. Understanding how today's young adults are spending their time is crucial to understanding if and how our society is changing.



Survey Instrument

## Recreational Reading

### Survey Flow

Block: Consent Statement (1 Question)

Branch: New Branch

If

If This survey is an effort to learn more about the recreational reading habits of traditional under... Disagree Is Selected

EndSurvey:

Block: General Hobbies (3 Questions)

Branch: New Branch

If

If Read and respond to the following question carefully: Do you spend any of your free time readin... Yes Is Selected

Block: Reading as a Hobby (4 Questions)

Branch: New Branch

If

If Read and respond to the following question carefully: Do you spend any of your free time readin... No Is Selected

Block: Reading NOT as a Hobby (5 Questions)

Standard: Benefits & Drawbacks (5 Questions)

Standard: Demographics (8 Questions)

Page Break

**Start of Block: Consent Statement**

This survey is an effort to learn more about the recreational reading habits of traditional undergraduate college students ages 18-25. With your consent, you will have the ability to answer a few questions about how you spend your free time. Your responses will be completely anonymous. Your participation in this survey is important whether or not you like reading for fun because it will inform libraries and other college resources about how they can serve you better.

This survey should take 5 minutes to complete.

Please read each question carefully before responding.

Your participation is completely voluntary and all of your responses will be kept confidential.

If you have any questions or comments about the survey, please contact [drscott@bsu.edu](mailto:drscott@bsu.edu).

By selecting "agree" below, you are indicating that you have read the above information and you voluntarily agree to participate in our survey.

If you wish not to participate, please decline by selecting "disagree."

☐ Agree (1)

☐ Disagree (2)

**End of Block: Consent Statement****Start of Block: General Hobbies**



Approximately how many days per week do you have time for activities for fun outside of school, work, and sleep?

- ☐ 0 (1)
- ☐ 1-2 (2)
- ☐ 3-4 (3)
- ☐ 5-6 (4)
- ☐ 7 (5)

On days when you spend time on activities for fun, approximately how many hours per day do you spend on these activities?

- ☐ 1-4 (2)
- ☐ 5-9 (3)
- ☐ 10-14 (4)
- ☐ 15+ (5)

Page Break

*Read and respond to the following question carefully:*

Do you spend any of your free time reading books, magazines, websites, or other reading materials for fun?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

End of Block: General Hobbies

Start of Block: Reading as a Hobby

Do you spend time reading each of the following times of reading materials *for fun*? Please select yes or no for each of the following.

	Yes (1)	No (2)
Books (either print or ebook) (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Magazines (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Websites (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Newspapers (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Approximately how many days per week do spend time reading for fun?

☐ 1-2 (2)

☐ 3-4 (3)

☐ 5-6 (4)

☐ 7 (5)

On days when you spend time reading for fun, approximately how many hours per day do you spend on this activity?

☐ 1-4 (2)

☐ 5-9 (3)

☐ 10-14 (4)

☐ 15+ (5)



In a sentence or two, please explain why you choose to spend free time reading for fun.

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End of Block: Reading as a Hobby

Start of Block: Reading NOT as a Hobby

Instead of reading, do you spend any of your free time on the following activities? Please select yes or no for each of the following.

	Yes (1)	No (2)
TV/ Using Streaming Services (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Video Games (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Socializing (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exercising/Sports (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clubs/Organizations (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Activity (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do any of the following reasons help to explain why you do not read for fun? Select yes or no for each of the following.

	Yes (1)	No (2)
I do not like reading (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not have time (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not have access to reading materials (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I cannot find reading materials that interest me (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



*Display This Question:*

*If Why don't you read for fun? Select yes or no for each of the following. = I do not have time [ Yes ]*

If you had more time, how likely would you be to spend time reading for fun?

- ☐ Extremely likely (1)
- ☐ Moderately likely (2)
- ☐ Slightly likely (3)
- ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely (4)
- ☐ Slightly unlikely (5)
- ☐ Moderately unlikely (6)
- ☐ Extremely unlikely (7)

*Display This Question:*

*If Why don't you read for fun? Select yes or no for each of the following. = I do not have access to reading materials [ Yes ]*

If you had adequate access to reading materials, how likely would you be to spend time reading for fun?

- ☐ Extremely likely (1)
- ☐ Moderately likely (2)
- ☐ Slightly likely (3)
- ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely (4)
- ☐ Slightly unlikely (5)
- ☐ Moderately unlikely (6)
- ☐ Extremely unlikely (7)

*Display This Question:*

*If Why don't you read for fun? Select yes or no for each of the following. = I cannot find reading materials that interest me [ Yes ]*

If you could find reading materials that interest you, how likely would you be to spend time reading for fun?

- ☐ Extremely likely (1)
- ☐ Moderately likely (2)
- ☐ Slightly likely (3)
- ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely (4)
- ☐ Slightly unlikely (5)
- ☐ Moderately unlikely (6)
- ☐ Extremely unlikely (7)

End of Block: Reading NOT as a Hobby



## Start of Block: Benefits &amp; Drawbacks

In your opinion, are there potential benefits to spending time reading for fun?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Not Sure (3)

*Display This Question:*

*If In your opinion, are there potential benefits to spending time reading for fun? = Yes*

Besides fun itself, what benefits do you believe spending time reading for fun can provide?

	Yes (1)	No (2)
Increased Knowledge (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased Empathy (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased Attention Span (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased Comprehension (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*Display This Question:*

*If Besides fun itself, what benefits do you believe spending time reading for fun can provide? = Other [ Yes ]*

You selected "other" for the previous question. Please explain any other benefits that you believe reading for fun can provide.

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In your opinion, are there potential drawbacks to spending time reading for fun?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Not Sure (3)

*Display This Question:*

*If in your opinion, are there potential drawbacks to spending time reading for fun? = Yes*

What drawbacks do you believe spending time on reading for fun can provide?

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End of Block: Benefits & Drawbacks

Start of Block: Demographics



Are you currently enrolled full time or part time at a college or university?

☐ Full Time (1)

☐ Part Time (2)

What is your current university standing?

☐ Freshman (1)

☐ Sophomore (2)

☐ Junior (3)

☐ Senior (4)

☐ Not sure (5)

☐ Other (6)

*Display This Question:*

*If What is your current university standing? = Other*

You selected "other" for the previous question. Please describe your current university standing.

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How old are you, in years?

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What is your gender?

- ☐ Male (1)
- ☐ Female (2)
- ☐ Other (3) \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Prefer not to answer (4)

What race(s)/ethnicit(ies) do you identify with? *Mark all that apply.*

- ☐ White (1)
- ☐ Black (2)
- ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander (3)
- ☐ Hispanic (4)
- ☐ Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_



What is the highest level of school that either of your parents have completed?

- ☐ Less than high school degree (1)
- ☐ High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED) (2)
- ☐ Some college but no degree (3)
- ☐ Associate degree in college (2-year) (4)
- ☐ Bachelor's degree in college (4-year) (5)
- ☐ Master's degree (6)
- ☐ Doctoral degree (7)
- ☐ Professional degree (JD, MD) (8)



Q29 What is your current GPA on a 4.0 scale to the nearest tenth?  
ex: 3.2

\_\_\_\_\_

End of Block: Demographics

End of Block: Demographics

## Methodology & Calendar

### Population

I am studying undergraduate college students in the U.S. ages 18-25. This population would include all races and ethnicities and all class levels (upper, middle, lower,...etc.). I would like to obtain data from colleges and universities nationwide. The hope is that by selecting a simple random sample of my population, variation will be encountered in terms of location, type of school, type of student, etc.

### Sampling Frame

For my sampling frame, I will use the DataMasters College Student Database of the largest collection of enrolled college students, updated monthly and collected through year books, surveys, and multiple proprietary sources. This resource is useful as a sampling frame for my study because it will allow me to access names, addresses, and e-mails of college students at 2 and 4-year universities from a pool of over 8.6 million. The students are searchable by School Name, Class Year, Gender, and Income. While none of these options would be particularly valuable for my project because some of them will end up being independent variables within the study, I plan to opt for the premium search criteria of age, which will cost more, but be much more valuable to my data as it will ensure that my respondents are within the age range that I am seeking.

### Estimated Sample Size



There are around 17 million undergraduate students currently enrolled at a credible institution and I selected a precision level of .03 and a confidence level of 1.96 in order to obtain accurate and specific data. My calculation for estimated sample required the use of a sample size calculator for multiple regression based on my predictors of dependent variables which were race, class, gender, and university standing. This calculation indicated that I need an estimated sample size of around 144. However, the database that I plan to use as my sampling frame requires a minimum purchase of \$450, so to address this problem I have increased my sample size to 2,600 to reach this number. Even though this sample is much higher than the one indicated by my initial calculation, this could provide a potential benefit of having more than enough responses in case of a high nonresponse rate. Since my survey will be using multiple modes of contact as well as multiple reminders, I would estimate my response rate to be around 60% of those who receive the survey. 60% of 2,600 is 1,560, leaving my total number of respondents well above the required amount of 144.

### **Pretest and Pilot**

To pretest my survey, I will be sending a final draft of the instrument in Qualitrics to 15-20 college students within the selected age range that I already know here at Ball State. I will allow a comments section at the end to allow for feedback on how the instrument could be improved. I will attempt to select people with different characteristics including age, race, and gender so that as many potential differences can be addresses in the respondent answers. This pilot test will allow me to see how respondents react to my instrument including things like unit nonresponse and item nonresponse and question errors or confusions.

### **Survey Delivery & Contacts**

This study will be implementing a web-based survey with multiple contacts through the mediums of web and mail. I chose to create the survey instrument on a web-based medium because of the high uses of technology that college students are used to as well as proven research about high response rates of web-based surveys in relation to mail surveys. Multiple modes will be used to contact respondents because this has also been proven to help increase response rates and to be able to give a physical incentive (in the form of a \$2 bill through the mail). A first contact will be done by mail using the addresses gained from the College Student Database. The letter that each respondent receives will contain instructions on how to view the survey that will be sent later via e-mail as well as their \$2 incentive to encourage them to take the survey. The letter will provide necessary information about the survey and how it is useful and indicate how soon an e-mail will arrive with a link to the survey. The survey will arrive 2 days later via a link in an e-mail that will direct them to my survey on Qualtrics. If the respondent has not completed the survey within 1.5 weeks they will receive a secondary e-mail with more information regarding the survey and its importance. I choose to administer the letter first because data shows that mail-contact first leads to better response rates, especially among college students. I also choose to include the \$2 bill incentive within this letter because research indicates that receiving the incentive ahead of time also increases response rates as well as captures the attention of the respondent early on. I will follow up with e-mail because the survey will be self-administered online through Qualtrics and the process of e-mailing the link to all respondents will be easier on the respondents who will be young, computer-savvy individuals. Lastly, I am choosing to send a secondary follow-up e-mail



if the respondent has failed to respond after 1.5 weeks in order to remind the respondent of the survey in case they have forgotten and make sure to obtain as high of a response rate as possible.

### **Calendar**

Below is a rough timeline of events of this research endeavor from start to finish:

- Creation and distribution of 2,600 letters with \$2 bill enclosed **(1 week)**
- Construction and implementation of e-mail to each individual with a working survey link **(2 days)**
- Allow 1.5 weeks for respondents to complete the survey instrument **(1.5 weeks)**
- Construction and implementation of secondary e-mail to individuals who have not yet completed the survey instrument **(2 days)**
- Allow 2 additional weeks for any last respondents to complete the survey instrument before ending collection process. **(2 weeks)**

For this timeline, I have assumed that I am engaged in the process of this study while enrolled full time as a student with no help from others in terms of assistance creating and distributing the materials. Since I will likely have course work to get through at the same time, this will limit time that can be dedicated to this project, and I believe that I have accounted for this within this timeline. Given that each of these processes occur at a different time and do not overlap, the total time estimated for data collection and processing time is around 5 weeks in total. Since mail is a somewhat slower mode of distributing information, I have increased waiting periods to adjust for this delay. Respondents should receive their letter in the mail the day before or the day

of receiving their e-mailed survey link. This will ensure that the information from the letter is fresh in their head when they see the e-mail appear. From the initial letter to the last e-mail will be around 2 weeks, but extra time will be needed for the creation of envelopes with stamps, printing and shipping of materials as well as the respondent's time taken to actually take the survey.



## Budget

<i>Item</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i># of Item</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Student Name &amp; Address</i>	\$ 0.15	2600	\$ 390.00
<i>E-mail Address</i>	\$ 0.03	2600	\$ 78.00
<i>Envelopes</i>		2600	\$ 282.00
<i>Stamps</i>	\$ 0.50	2600	\$ 1,300.00
<i>\$2 bills</i>	\$ 2.00	2600	\$ 5,200.00
<i>Total</i>			\$ 7,250.00

## Budget Justification

Previous research on the recreational reading habits of college students has been mostly regional in scope and on small scales. Within this project, I intend to gather data nation-wide in order to gain a better picture of nation as a whole. To make this happen, the majority of my budget will go towards supplies for the study itself, as opposed to hiring individuals to help me get the work done. For the context of this budget, I am assuming that I am taking on this research project while enrolled as a full-time student with no help from others in terms of assistance creating and

distributing survey materials. Furthermore, I will not be compensating myself for this work, so no amount of the budgeted allotment of \$7,500 will be put to use in that manner. Any additional funds that remain after the completion of this project will be used to fund presentation and publishing of data that is collected through my work.

I have opted for a multi-mode contact method, while the survey instrument itself will be strictly web-based. I chose to create the survey instrument on a web-based medium because of the high uses of technology that college students are used to as well as proven research about high response rates of web-based surveys in relation to mail surveys. Multiple modes will be used to contact respondents because this has also been proven to help increase response rates and to be able to give a physical incentive (in the form of a \$2 bill through the mail).

#### *Student Name & Address*

Through a database called DataMasters College Student Database, the names and corresponding addresses of college students that fall within my population of traditional undergraduate college students in the U.S. ages 18-25. The database requires a minimum purchase of \$450 so I have adjusted my sample size to meet this minimum, which ends up being 2600 students. Each name & address costs 10 cents to acquire. The extra 5 cents per name and address reflects a decision to insure that each student selected will fall within my given age range, 18-25. 2,600 student names at 15 cents a piece totals \$390.

#### *E-mail Address*



Through the same database that will grant me access to student names and addresses, for an additional 3 cents per student, a matching e-mail will be provided. This information is necessary given the survey itself will be web-based. 2,600 e-mail addresses at 3 cents a piece totals \$78.

#### *Envelopes & Stamps*

Envelopes and stamps will be required in order to distribute the initial contact by mail. The cost of the envelopes will include the professional printing of each respondents name and address as well as a return label. The postage stamps are forever stamps priced at 50 cents each with United States Air Mail written on them which I hope will indicate the importance of the respondent to open and follow the directions of the letter as opposed to a stamp with something less serious such as a flower or animal.

#### *\$2 Bills*

\$2 bill incentives will be used within this research project because research indicates that receiving an incentive ahead of time increases response rates as well as captures the attention of the respondent early on. The bills will have to be preordered at the bank to insure that there is adequate time for the correct number of bills (2600) to be collected.

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